

'How I Set World's Hiking Record, Walking 600 Miles Without Food'

George Hasler Johnston
Tells Mile-by-Mile Story
of Historic 20-Day Feat

By George Hasler Johnston

I HAVE established a world's record.

I have accomplished the most stupendous feat of human endurance mankind has ever seen.

I have made a record that never has been equalled, and I doubt if it will be equalled for many years to come.

I have hiked nearly six hundred miles, through storm and wind and sunshine, through burning heat and under innumerable difficulties, in twenty days, and not a morsel of food has passed my lips. At Bald Knob, Pennsylvania, eighteen miles west of Bedford and the highest point of the Alleghany Mountains, where my hike was concluded, and on June 20—the longest day of the year—I looked back over the route I had taken, the thousand and one incidents of the trip, the hardships I had endured, and with all the joy that an athlete feels in his own prowess I am proud—vastly proud—of my accomplishment. My record is not even remotely approached. It is one to aim at.

Now let's see somebody beat it!

I am not boastful. I set out on this walk to call public attention to hiking and fasting and to inspire enthusiasm therein. When you read this story, you will agree with me that I do not boast.

Other Records

I believe I have beaten the endurance test of Edward Payson Weston, who, at 72, walked 3,600 miles in seventy-six days and twenty-three hours across the continent; of Richard Fausel, who partially fasted for ninety days; of Terence MacSwiney, who died on the seventy-fifth day of a hunger strike; of the Riffian dispatch runner, Hammauch Ben Hadge, who ran seventy miles in one day when he was 67 years old.

I do not mean to detract from the glory achieved by these remarkable men. But I have accomplished even more than they. I sincerely believe my record is one worthy of a place in the annals of events that have sorely tested the physical reserve power of mortal man.

When Mr. Macfadden consented that I, as an employee and representative of Physical Culture Magazine, should attempt the record which I have now established, he promised me a prize of \$1,000 if I made good.

I reached the 500-mile mark and he notified me that I had won, and was at liberty to end my fast and walk at once and return home.

Feet Tortured Me

But I kept on. I did not like to conclude the hike. My mind urged me forward. Generally, my body was in fine condition. The doctors said I was a great credit to the cause. Yet, again and again, when my advisors asked me to stop, I kept on. How they complimented me on my grit!

But tortured nature demanded rest. The tissues were worn from my feet by the thousands of steps I had taken over burning pavements, and the delicate bones that form the arches were unprotected. This caused me excruciating pain. At last I had to stop.

On this amazing hike I lost 37½ pounds. Mentally, I was as good as at the beginning.

My hike, as James H. Hocking, who accompanied me, said, was no picnic.

I have traveled all kinds of roads—brick, asphalt, macadam, cement, hard dirt, broken stones, gravel and through mud ankle deep. Many times the hot pavement so burned my feet that I walked through roadside puddles to cool them.

I walked when the sun was bright, the air balmy and the breezes cooling. I walked through pouring rain, through thunderstorms and against winds which fairly rained dust and sand into my face for hours. I walked in the daylight and late into the night. I have been blistered by suns which burned from rising to setting at 90 degrees. I have been chilled to the bones by gales which cut through my clothing.

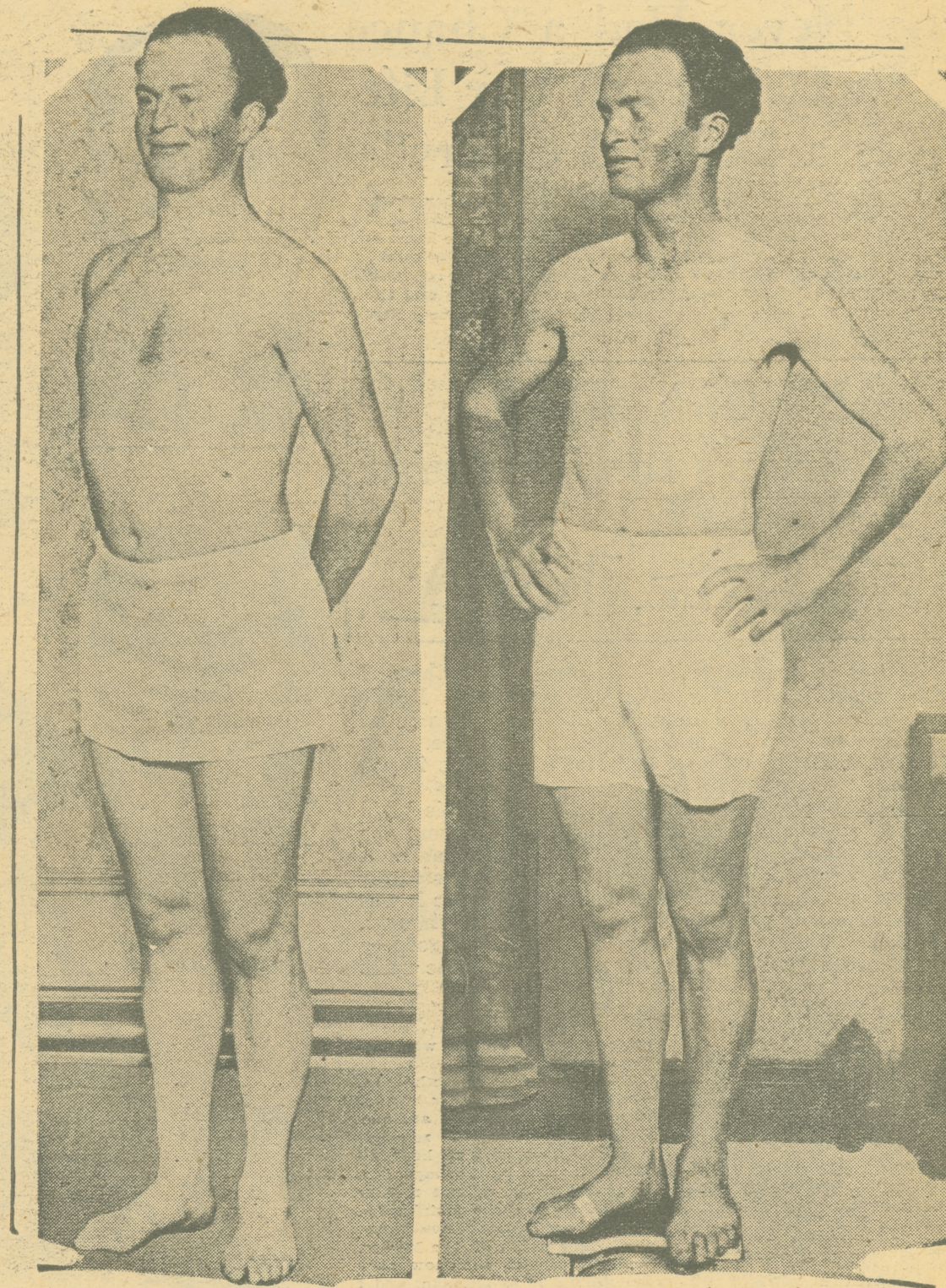
Crowds Delayed Me

Once I walked more than 45 miles in a single day. On others I trudged forty-three and forty-two miles. I frequently have covered from thirty to thirty-eight in a day. The second shortest distance I walked in a day was fourteen miles. That was to bring me into Pittsburgh to deliver a health talk and take part in a great, citywide reception planned for me.

Frequently conditions have kept me on the road twelve hours in a single day. Once I did not complete my stint until I had been out nearly seventeen hours. That was the day I did more than forty-six miles while the thermometer boiled around 90 degrees from sun-up till after dusk.

From the beginning of my walk to the present time I have been acclaimed by crowds along practically every foot of the way. At times our little party literally had to fight its way through massed humans. At other times help was given us by state and city motorcycle police, who forced lanes for us. Our average loss of time because of crowds has been more than two hours a day.

But men, women and children generally have been my friends, cheering me on, crying aloud



George Hasler Johnston before and after his record-breaking walk.

their good wishes. There were, of course, a few scoffers who said:

"I suppose the doctors dope him up every now and then. I bet they've got food hidden in their automobiles. They sneak him a sandwich now and then."

Despite what they said, I took nothing but water from June 1. When my throat felt burned out or swollen shut, I never sought relief from anything but water—not even a bit of vaseline.

There never was a second when I was not under the observation of strangers. My room was watched so that no food could be smuggled to me. All this is attested and sworn to under seal in our log-book by persons whom we did not know until the time of our arrival.

There were a host of queer incidents on the trip. Hunger constantly assailed me.

I never believed there were so many restaurants, inns, ice cream and frankfurter stands as I have counted along the roads; or innumerable places offering fresh eggs and broilers.

I seemed to have a knack of running into funerals. But the climax was reached one day after I had counted seven hearses.

Then I called a halt for a drink of water and a roadside sign read: "Prepare to meet thy end."

Now just a few words about the splendid fellows whom Mr. Macfadden assigned to accompany me, and without whose aid I never could have succeeded. They were Dr. Peter L. Lersch of the Physical Culture Health Department, James H. Hocking, the 70-year-old distance walker, and John Williams, chauffeur.

The doctor, who knows the human body inside and out as the average schoolboy knows his A B C's, also is a speaker, diplomat and all-round business man. He shared with Jim Hocking the labor of keeping me fit.

Williams trailed us with our extra shoes and wearing apparel and the supply of water which has been food and drink to me. He also kept a searchlight playing on me when I walked after dark, to prevent me being run over, even though it attracted a cloud of moths, gnats, mosquitoes and other flying things.

Before taking up my walk in detail, I must repeat what has been said in previous articles, that my walk was not done for

any personal glorification but to prove the soundness of physical culture methods, clean living, diet, and persistent exercise, to demonstrate the super-endurance of a person absolutely physically fit.

"Atta boy, Johnston, we're rooting for you!"

"So long, Pinkie, and good luck!"

"Shake a leg, kid, you're a thousand miles from home!"

These and other similar cries of encouragement, re-echoing between the monster buildings of Chicago's famous Loop, gave me one of the greatest thrills of my life as I trudged along through the business district of the great mid-Western metropolis shortly before noon on June 1.

Jim Hocking, my 70-year-old side kick, was at my elbow, while Dr. Lersch and the others of the Macfadden forces followed close in automobiles.

Every one in the city must have read about my stunt, for never in my life had I seen a greater crowd jammed in such a comparatively small area. The business and the lunch hour

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